

CHEERFUL AGAIN by Natalie Becker

When the tears hit my cheek, I slammed the radio “off” button. I didn’t want to listen to Christian music any more. Songs that once made me feel close to God, now made me sad. The past year had been awful. Mom, my little brother Ben and I had to deal with a lot when Dad moved out of our home in California and headed for his new place in New Mexico. To be honest, at first I was relieved, but after a few months, I began to miss him. Now, I was tired of tears and sadness and tired of feeling so unsure about everything.

I had been attending a large non-denominational church-Foothills Christian Fellowship, with Aunt Lindee and Uncle Chuck. It was there I had accepted Jesus into my heart. But about a month ago, they quit going, so I quit too. Actually, I was kind of glad. I needed a break from church. Even though there were many kids my own age and the sermon was directed toward teenagers, church just didn’t mean to me what I thought it should mean. Most of the kids were there because their parents made them come or for the social reasons. And since the church was so big, I hardly knew anyone.

Then Aunt Lindee phoned and asked if I wanted to come with her, Uncle Chuck and my cousin Rachel to a new church. I wasn’t so sure, but since Mom usually attended Al-anon meetings on Sundays or worked at the hospital, I agreed to come along.

I was surprised when the car pulled into Boulder Oaks Elementary School. The church—Christ Our Saviour Anglican Church—was in the auditorium of my old school!

Things were different at this church compared to Foothills Christian Fellowship. Other than my cousin Rachel, there weren’t any kids my age, but the friendly smiles made me feel welcome. When people asked about my week, I began to open up. I’d talk about a problem I was having in school or I’d mention the difficulties of living in a single parent home. The next Sunday, I’d see the same friendly faces and they’d ask if I had solved the problem we had talked about or how things were going. *Wow! These people really care about me.* Each Sunday, things at the



church were the same—same prayer book, same prayers, same faces and same coffee hour with all the delicious goodies. During my school week, I was so busy with schoolwork, lab reports, tests, meeting with teachers, after-school tutorials, cheer, gymnastics and not to mention the 5-6 hours of homework each day. I never knew what would come my way. That sameness on Sundays felt good. When my new friends at Christ our Saviour shared their life experiences with me, I discovered that I really cared about what they had to say.

Each Sunday, I joined my cousin Rachel in Sunday school. I learned that Rachel was going to be confirmed and that everything we learned in Sunday school was for that purpose. I wondered if I could also be confirmed. My aunt and uncle talked with Fr. Frank and we decided that I would need to be baptized first and could probably be confirmed the following year.

My baptism was really special and it made me feel like I belonged to the church. Also, I finally got to take Holy Communion, which I had watched my family do for so long, without being able to participate. It felt really good.

As I continued confirmation classes with Terri and Margaret as teachers, we talked about the Book of Common Prayer and I learned a lot about the faith, but sometimes we'd talk about other things. One lady who assisted in the class told me she had been a single parent and had raised her daughter alone. I began to better understand what my mom was going through.

Fr. Frank was so nice and as I continued to come to church regularly, I could tell that he also really cared about me.



“Are you ready to get confirmed?” he asked one Sunday.

“When I started the classes, I wanted to wait another year for confirmation because I didn’t know if I liked this church and would stay here,” I said. “But, I’m ready now and it feels good to be a part of this church family.”

While baptism was an easy first step, confirmation was different. It was a choice I had to make and a responsibility I had to accept. I had prayed about it and had embraced this next step.

As the days came closer to confirmation, I ran into a problem. I’m a cheerleader and I realized that picture day fell on the same day as confirmation day. I know it sounds silly, right? It seems like I would immediately realize that my faith is more important than cheer pictures, but I had to make a choice. Either way, I would be letting people down. We were taught in cheer how much “team” meant. I couldn’t let the team down, especially since I was in special stunts and was part of the pyramid. Mom agreed with me. Without me there could be no pyramid. Since Bishop Leo was coming to confirm others and not just me alone, I decided I could wait one more year. After all, Uncle Chuck was getting confirmed and he was in his 50’s. I felt disappointed, but I thought I had made the right choice. I hoped Fr. Frank and Bishop Leo felt the same way.

Mom had a cake made for the occasion and on confirmation day we rushed from cheer photos to the church to arrive at least in time for the celebration after the service.

Bishop Leo was expecting me. I’d have to explain myself.

What would he think about me missing confirmation for cheer pictures?

Fr. Frank and Bishop Leo must have noticed that I was a bit nervous as we rushed into the building. As I fumbled for words to explain why I couldn’t make it, they stepped aside to talk. *I hope I’m not in trouble.*

As I was taking a bite of confirmation cake, Bishop Leo called my name.

“Natalie,” he said. “We can do your confirmation service today. We can have the ceremony outdoors this afternoon where the new church is being built.”

Wow! I could still get confirmed. Not with the group. Not in Boulder Oaks Elementary Auditorium, but in a one-on-one service outdoors just for me.

On a warm fall evening, as the California sun began to lower in the western sky, with Fr. Frank alongside me and Bishop Leo before me and my family surrounding me, I was confirmed. It felt like Jesus gave me a hug. I had a warm nice feeling and a reassurance from the Holy Spirit that my confirmation was meant to happen just like it did. It was God’s will. A lot of things happen in life, negative and positive, but I’ve learned from them. I’ve also realized that with love from God and from others, no matter what, things would be okay. Two of my favorite Bible verses came to mind that day. “*Therefore if any man is in Christ he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold new things have come*”(2 Corinthians 5:17), and also, “*I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me*”(Phillipians 4:13).

I rode home that evening and as the Christian music played on the car radio, I smiled and sang along.